



# Important Points About Poisoning in Horses



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Poisoning incidents are uncommon in horses. Generally, horses are very selective eaters and somewhat less likely to be poisoned than some other domestic species. But when poisonings do occur, they can be extremely difficult and costly to treat. Some even result in sudden death.

Almost any plant or feed can be toxic when fed in excess or when suddenly introduced. Consider that even nutritious grasses can be triggers for laminitis at certain times of the year. **Your role is to be aware of the pertinent toxic hazards for your region and situation, and prevent consumption of them by your horses whenever possible.**

Other than plant poisoning, there are other important poisoning agents that horse owners and caretakers should be aware of, and they too are briefly addressed here.

Agent	Basics	Your Role	HSVg link
Blister Beetle	Toxin in beetle bodies in alfalfa hay. Colic, diarrhea, straining with urination, salivation.	Be on the lookout in hay as you feed Purchase from same supplier. Ask producer.	<a href="http://horsesidevetguide.com/drv/Diagnosis/551/blister-beetle-toxicity/">http://horsesidevetguide.com/drv/Diagnosis/551/blister-beetle-toxicity/</a>
Monensin	Feed additive that damages heart and muscle. Colic, weight loss, diarrhea.	Select feed mills carefully.	<a href="http://horsesidevetguide.com/drv/Diagnosis/195/monensin-toxicity/">http://horsesidevetguide.com/drv/Diagnosis/195/monensin-toxicity/</a>
Moldy Corn	Fungal toxin affects brain. Depression, down and cannot rise.	Do not feed cracked corn or corn screenings. Throw away any questionable grain. Store with care.	<a href="http://horsesidevetguide.com/drv/Diagnosis/127/moldy-corn-toxicity/">http://horsesidevetguide.com/drv/Diagnosis/127/moldy-corn-toxicity/</a>
Botulism	Paralyzing bacterial toxin. Slowly worsening weakness and wobbliness.	Consider with big bales, carcasses in hay.	<a href="http://horsesidevetguide.com/drv/Diagnosis/552/botulism/">http://horsesidevetguide.com/drv/Diagnosis/552/botulism/</a>
Blue Green Algae	Potent toxins in algae that bloom under certain circumstances. Sudden death and liver failure.	Watch water source. Only clean, fresh water. Especially during warm/hot months.	<i>Soon to be finished &amp; published!</i>

Here are some general preventive points to minimize the likelihood of toxicity:

### **Stabled Horses**

- Never feed clippings of any sort to a horse. Grass, hedge, prunings, etc.
- Never make sudden changes in diet of any kind.
- Be aware of the trees and ornamental plant species around the facility that your horses will be exposed to or near. Many species are toxic, including common species like Black Locust, Russian Olive and Oleander
- Feed hay from a known, consistent source.
- Look carefully at the hay you feed. Separate out plants that look different or wrong, for identification.
- Examine grain before feeding. If looks or smells abnormal, throw it away.
- When in doubt about any feed, don't feed it.

### **Horses on Pasture**

- Be able to identify the common poisonous plants in your region and at your facility. Ensure your animals do not consume them.
- Identify and correct environment and management factors that may set up a poisoning scenario.
- When in doubt, always keep horses fed well with quality hay.
- Watch water sources carefully. Always provide clean, fresh water.

### **Traveling, Trail Riding & Packing**

- Don't let your horse near any plant you don't know.
- Especially, do not leave horses tied within reach of potentially toxic plants.
- Don't let your horse gorge on new grass.
- Choose water sources carefully.

## **An incomplete list of plants to be aware of, in order of danger.**

*I selected these plants because they are common in our region, and can be toxic. This is my opinion and it is arbitrary. There are literally dozens more to consider, just in this area!*

Loco Weeds and Vetches, Black Locust, Cocklebur, Poison Hemlock, Milk Weeds, Bind Weed, Horsetail, Groundsel and other PA's, Gambel Oak, Bracken Fern, Death Camas, Russian Olive, Water Hemlock, Jimson Weed, Larkspurs, Skunk Cabbage, Sleepy Grass, Yellow Sweet Clover in hay, Tansy Mustard, Lupine, Broom Snakeweed, Chokecherry, Pig Weed , Kochia,

### **Resource & References**

- New Mexico State University – Poisoning Plants of NM Rangelands:  
[http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/\\_circulars/CR-531/welcome.html](http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_circulars/CR-531/welcome.html)
- Native Plant Society of New Mexico:  
<http://www.npsnm.org>
- CSU – Guide to Poisonous Plants – Searchable database with images:  
[http://www.vth.colostate.edu/poisonous\\_plants/index.cfm](http://www.vth.colostate.edu/poisonous_plants/index.cfm)
- ASPCA Plants Poisonous to Horses. Searchable database with images:  
<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/horse-plant-list>
- Horse Side Vet Guide [www.HorseSideVetGuide.com](http://www.HorseSideVetGuide.com) – iOS & Android mobile app, free website - created by Dr. Thal

### **Books:**

- *A Guide to Plant Poisoning of Animals in North America.* Anthony P. Knight, BVSc, MS, and Richard G. Walter, MA Botany: Teton New Media

- *Horse Owner's Field Guide to Toxic Plants*. Sandra M. Burger: Breakthrough Publications, Inc.
- *Toxic Plants of North America*. George E. Burrows and Ronald J. Tyrl: Iowa State University Press.
- *Natural Poisons in Horses*. Jeffery O. Hall: National Animal Poison Control Center.